

An Abnormality in the Coconut Palm.

BY I. H. BURKILL.

The accompanying plate represents two young coconut palms existing side by side in the Cocos islands. The photographs from which it was prepared, and the branches from which this note has been drawn up, were obtained by Dr. J. R. McVail, of the Colonial Medical Service from Mr. Cormo Clunies Ross, Cocos-Keeling Islands, who has been so good as to put them at the writer's service.

The abnormality is of the same nature as one described by Mr. H. N. Ridley in the *Annals of Botany*, XXI. (1907) p. 420, as a "bulbilliferous coconut," brought to his notice by Mr. R. Scott upon a plantation in the Dindings. Mr. Scott's tree was then ten years old; and from the time when it should have come into bearing, it had been producing instead of flowering spathes, leafy shoots which would grow to a length of 4-5 feet and then fall off "by their own weight."

It is not recorded in regard to these Cocos islands palms whether the branches fall off or persist: but the abnormality is of essentially the same nature, *i.e.* a case of foliation of the bracts of the inflorescences, so that the inflorescence is turned into a leafy branch; it is also sterile. The larger of the two branches sent to me was very much flattened at the base, being 15 cm. from horn to horn with a maximum thickness of only 1.5 cm. Twenty centimetres from the base it became columnar with a diameter of 5.5 cm. All the foliage leaves, 14 in number, are borne on this columnar part, the longest being about 160 cm. long.

The persistence of such a shoot would lead to that rare occurrence—a permanently branched coconut palm: on the other hand if the branches fall off, as is almost certainly the case, the duration of their persistence should be noted, as it is possible that they may hold in their place as if they were inflorescences just so long as their nuts would have taken to mature, had they been fertile.



Two Coconut Palms exhibiting Foliation in the Inflorescences.